1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

Dongar, sleeping the first night at Orcha, twenty-five miles from Kurmer, descending in the morning fourteen miles to Dhaurai, doing their selling and buying and eating a noon meal, and then return that afternoon to sleep again at Orcha, reaching Kurmer on the third day by noon. And their route is no easy one, but up hill and down dale along rough mountain paths. The men will carry heavy loads balanced at either end of a carrying stick borne on their shoulder, proceeding at a jog trot, for nine or ten miles over similar paths, but stop to drink and paddle at the streams, and get very exhausted if they have to carry weights much farther; on the other hand, after food and an hour's rest they are ready to walk back at once to their villages. Three Hill Marias on my last visit to the hills came to my camp at Itulnar some seventy miles across country, with letters, and met me on the march at 8 a.m. in the hills on the third morning after they had set out, having done twelve miles that morning along an exceptionally arduous mountain path. When the crops are ripe on the *penda* slopes and the men are sleeping there, the women go twice a day to them with their food, and sometimes have a heavy day's reaping as well; the *penda* may be five or six miles away from the village and high above it.

Like the Nagas of the Assam hills, the Hill Marias prefer walking over hilly country to long treks on the plains, and are excellent hill and tree climbers. All the Koitor of Bastar, in fact, are remarkably agile tree climbers, and seem to walk up trees rather than climb.

The Bison-horn Maria is even better developed physically than the Hill Maria, and has similar powers of endurance, though on the level plateau villages he does not become the adept hill climber that every Hill Maria is. He leaves less, however, to his women. He can be seen at his physical fittest when dancing for hours with tireless verve and agility, wearing on his head a heavy head-dress of bison-horns with plumes of peacock and jungle-cock feathers and strings of cowries, with a heavy cylindrical drum of hollowed tree-trunk three feet or more long slung from his shoulders, and sometimes carrying a small son frogwise on his chest. He will carry stick-loads of grain sixty or seventy miles to market in the Godavari valley, for even he makes as yet only little use of carts or beasts of burden; the Hill Maria makes none at all.

The Hill Maria wears nothing but a loin-cloth of coarse cotton in winter, summer and rains, though an occasional man may have a piece of similar cloth big enough to wrap over his shoulders at night, and a few headmen have blankets. His body, therefore, is inured to heat and to great cold; for frosts are frequent in his hills, and even as late as the end of March the thermometer may fall to 42°

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria

796 one visits the celebrations of other clans. The first new-eating is preceded by about four days by the *pira-mansha* or disease-riddance ceremony. Before holding this, the *kasyeq-gaita* obtains the permission of the clan-god. In the early morning every woman sweeps out her house, and the *kasyeq-gaita* goes to each house and collects a little of the sweepings in a winnowing-fan. Before noon all the males of the village go out to the western boundary, and there the collected sweepings are cast aside, either in the winnowing-fan, or else wrapped in rags and tied round a bamboo stick. They hang up on the boundary on cords between trees all their old winnowing-fans and broken baskets. Unmarried boys hang up [481] on a wooden frame at the boundary all their stilts; they make these at the beginning of the rains, and use them from then till this ceremony, their use being taboo at all other seasons: for some [184] reason not divulged, the manufacture and use of stilts is taboo throughout every fourth year. Eggs are offered near the old winnowing-fans and stilts.

The final new-eating, *Pupal Korta Tindana*, is the important occasion of the year. The greatest celebration of this seems to be that of the Usendi clan at Orcha, where their clan-god is brought from Japgunda. From miles around other clans send their youths to dance at the Orcha *Koqsar*; the girls come to carry their food for them, and, though excluded as a matter of course from the ceremonies, join in the dancing that follows *Koqsar*. At the clan new-eating gathering the village delegations assemble in the usual way with new pulses and grain, and the clan-priest sacrifices the cocks and pigs which they bring and sprinkles their blood on the clan-god. Then, however, the flesh of the victims is not divided up and carried off to be eaten in the houses, but boiled with the grain, etc., brought by the villages, in the clan-god's cooking pots kept at his *pen-rawar* in a special shed. When cooked, the stew is spread on a great dish of *siari* leaves stitched with thorns or bamboo splinters, and all the men sit round it on stones in a great circle, while the clan-priest goes round and, with his hands, serves a helping from the communal dish in each man's leaf-plate. The [535 *Koqsar* portion of the festival seems to be the orgy of dancing that 834] follows; for it should be remembered that in most of the Abujhmar country this festival signifies the end of the long period during which it is taboo for the men to sleep in their houses and to have sexual [533] intercourse. It is not a coincidence that the drums are beaten with the same rhythm at *Koqsar* and at weddings.

Small villages often do not have a separate *Pupal Korta Tindana* 796 before the Village Mother. But in the larger villages, especially 622 where the *udam-garya* custom prevails, the village celebration is

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

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The fermented sap of the sago-palm is a favourite drink

[p. 44 (2)]

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

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Plate CXLVIII

Stilt-fighting

[P.650 (B)]

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

THE GHOTUL AND RELIGION

III. The Stilt Festival

The use of stilts during the rains is a semi-religious practice common throughout Middle India and no doubt elsewhere.[1] It has been suggested that it has some magical significance aimed at encouraging the crops to grow.

'The Geeree', says Colonel Ward, describing the custom in Mandla, 'can hardly be called a festival: it is remarkable more for its absurdity than anything else, and is left to the children to celebrate. This they do by walking about the place on stilts for some days, praising the institution of the Geeree, or stilts, as placing them above the necessity of walking in the mud; and finally, proceeding in procession to the Nerbudda, they throw the stilts in and return to their homes.'[2]

The chelik have similar, but more fully developed, customs. The stilts are made of two poles of either ghotiya or sarai about 6' high, to which foot-rests are attached 2' from the ground. These are made of hollowed bits of char wood which are filled with pebbles and fixed together round the poles either by nails or small wooden pegs. The stilts are made early in the rains at the Amavas Pandum which corresponds to the Hareli festival of the Hindus. During the rains, the chelik constantly walk about on their stilts making a great deal of noise as the pebbles inside the hollowed foot-rests rattle about. The only game they play on the stilts is stilt-fighting when they attack each other and try to bump each other off.[3] They become expert in lifting one of the stilts off the ground and hitting another boy with it. They are also able to do very clever solo dances, hopping on one leg with the other raised from the ground.

Stilt-walking is permitted for a couple of months during the rains from the time of the Amavas Pandum until after the first New Eating ceremony in the middle of August or a little later. This is called the Korta Tindana in Gondi and on the second day of the festival, which is known as the Hara Tindana or the day on which the people eat the leavings of the food that remained after the big day of the festival, a special ceremony takes place in connexion with the stilts. After this day it is taboo to use stilts at all. Grigson adds that among the Hill Maria there is a rule that stilt-walking is not only taboo during the rest of the year but also every fourth year.[4]

On the second day of the Korta Tindana the chelik assemble and go round the village on their stilts holding bursundi plants in their hands. They dance in front of each house in turn begging for rice, eggs, liquor and money and sing,

Lāya dāya loo loon thi,
Rai hada hada the
Nīna daka dharthe,
Gondri bursundi pāra pāra.

This may be freely translated, 'O stinking mosquitoes, run away to the fields of rai before our feet touch the threshold, for with branches we are hunting

[1] As, for example, by the Angami and Ao Nagas, the Kuki and Kachari, and the Marquesans. See Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, p. 155 and J. G. Frazer, *Belief in Immortality* (London, 1913), Vol. II, pp. 339f. Russell gives photographs of Hindu boys on stilts (*op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 42 and 46) and describes the custom briefly at Vol. IV, p. 111.

[2] H. C. E. Ward, *Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Mandlah District* (Bombay, 1870), p. 63. Compare E. M. Gordon, 'Notes concerning the People of Mungeli Tahsil, Bilaspore District' in *JAS Beng.*, New Series, Vol. I (1905), p. 193.

[3] The Angami Nagas, like the Marquesan Islanders, play a game on stilts in which the contestants try to balance on one stilt and trip up their opponents with the other. See J. H. Hutton, 'Assam and the Pacific', *Man in India*, Vol. IV (1924), p. 6.

[4] Grigson, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

you'. As they dance, the boys beat the ground with their bursundi branches, as a result of which it is believed that stinging wasps and flies will not bother the village for the rest of the year.[1]

Then the chelik go on their stilts outside the village to where a stone stands on an ant-hill in honour either of Bhimul Pen, Dito Pen or Gorondi Muttai. They go in procession round the stone seven times and the Sirdar winds a string round and round it. He sends one of the boys some distance away and he himself presses his hand down on the ground to crack his fingers and says, 'Now we will see if you have really been helping us'. He picks up one of the eggs that they have begged from the village and throws it to where the other boy is standing. If the god is favourable, the egg does not break and the other boy picks it up and throws it back. They do this three times.[2] If the egg breaks the leader picks up the mess and rubs a little of it on the penis of every member of the party in turn saying, 'May we be free of itch and ringworm'.

Then they break their stilts and arrange them over the stone. Sometimes the stilts are tied in a sort of square and the foot-rests and pegs hung from it. Four stilts are placed upright at each corner and a cord is tied round them. They offer eggs and chickens at the foot of this shrine and tie the egg-shells in a string to the top of the stilts. They kill the chickens by hitting their heads on the ground, not by cutting their throats as usual. Then they cook the chickens and any other food that they have been given and eat the feast and drink as much liquor as they have been able to collect. There is a rule that on this day they must not cook on a stone hearth out of respect for the stone representing the deity, but should cut green pegs of saja wood, drive them into the ground and put their pots on these.

There are various stories to account for the origin of this ceremony. In the Kondagaon Tahsil the Muria say that on the festival of Amavas Lingo's brother, Bhimul, went out of his house to give salt to his cattle. His little son wept, crying, 'I want to go too', and as it was very muddy his mother Gorondi made him a pair of stilts and sent him with his father. When the village boys saw Bhimul's son walking on the stilts, they asked their fathers to make them also, but they said, 'No, we don't know how to do it'. So the boys went to Gorondi and persuaded her to make stilts for them. One day a boy fell down; Gorondi ran to him and rubbed the wound with her hands and it healed at once. The boys used to bring their wounds to be cured and their broken stilts for her to mend. At first she refused but afterwards she said, if they brought her eggs and chickens as payment, she would do anything they wanted. So ever since the boys give her presents once a year and she saves them from falling and the stilts from breaking.

Another version of the story attributes the origin of the practice to the notorious jealousy between Bhimul and his wife. There is always supposed to be bitter rivalry between them. In Bhandarsiuni, the Muria once dedicated a bull to Bhimul promising that they would sacrifice it to him if he gave them good rain. This made Gorondi very angry and her Siraha called the villagers and said to them, 'Why have you been so stupid as to give a bull to my husband? Bhimul has gone below to dig roots and he won't be back for six months, so

[1] Russell records a Teli custom at the Pola festival, when women bring branches of a thorny creeper which they call Marbod and sweep their houses saying, 'O Marbod, sweep away all diseases, pains, coughs, bugs, flies and mosquitoes'.—Russell and Hiralal, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 550. Cf. Hivale, op. cit., p. 123.

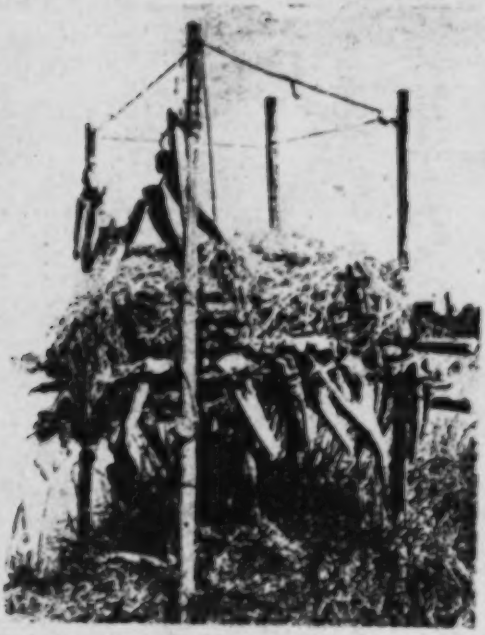
[2] Divination by egg-throwing, though in a different way, is common among the Khasi.—P. R. T. Gurdon, *The Khasis* (London, 1914), pp. 16 and 226f. For an interesting account of the folk-lore of eggs, see L. F. Newman, 'Some Notes on the Folklore of Poultry', *Folk-lore*, Vol. LIII (1940), pp. 104ff.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Good AW32
Muria

X883
●441
796

Stilts piled up outside
Phumlei village

Plate CXLIX



Stilts piled up over
Dimo Pen. of Abor

[p. 652 (A)]

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

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●481
824

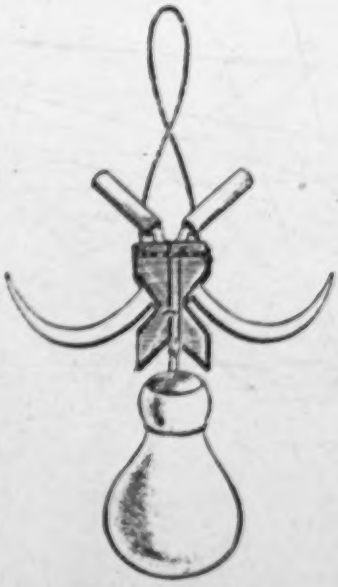
Maria climbing toddy tree to extract the juice

[Facing p. 97]

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

273 the trunk; sometimes bundles of thorns are placed to deter the thief. The owners sometimes live in little leaf-huts built below the trees in order to guard them. The tree is climbed 417 by a long bamboo pole which hooks on to a branch at the 481 summit. The side-shoots of the pole are not removed and these serve as the steps of the ladder. When not in use it is removed and kept in a house or in some hiding-place in the jungle. Sometimes a large loop is made at the end of the ladder and it fixes on to a bamboo hook which is tied to the tree. Once in Gogonda I saw a Maria getting up a very tall sago palm with great ingenuity. At the foot there was a pole eight feet high fixed in the ground. The climber had to get to the top of this and then, supporting himself upon it with his legs, had to catch the hook twenty feet above him with a long double bamboo pole with a loop at its end. This was no mean feat, and when it was done he had to tie the end of the swinging stick to the pole on which he had been standing and climb up to where he was able to hoist himself to the top of the tree by the branches.

In the Konta Tahsil the method of climbing is the same as that recorded for [273] the Kadir, which again compares with that of the Dyak of Borneo. Long lengths of bamboo are tied to the trunk. The climber ties round his waist an ingenious gadget, called *kach pirik*, holding two knives and a gourd, and he then climbs straight up the tree. In other villages the *mohukum* is used. This is a beautifully made arrangement of ropes by which the climber's body is attached to the trunk, and can be



Kach-pirik apparatus for extracting toddy-juice

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

slipped up it. Between his feet is tied another rope which holds them against the tree. He is thus able to get up the tree like a humping caterpillar. A Maria told me that in the evening the people go up the trees 'like a company of monkeys'. When villagers go to drink sago or toddy, they often take with them little leaf-bundles containing dry fish, roasted crabs, red ants or mahua paste.

It is impossible to say how much alcohol is drunk by the Maria. According to the Excise figures in the Dantewara Tahsil and Sukma Zamindari where the population is overwhelmingly Maria, the consumption per 100 in proof gallons is 46.48 and 50.51 respectively. In the Muria Tahsil to the north it is 32.43 in Kondagaon and 58.90 in Narayanpur. Narayanpur, it must be remembered, has a large population of Hill Maria who do not drink rice-beer which may explain why there is a higher consumption of mahua spirit. In the Bison-horn Maria area, there are —according to the Settlement records—about 75,000 toddy trees. The number of sago palms is not known, but is—I believe—considerably smaller.

Mohukum ropes for climbing toddy trees

Illicit distillation was a feature of two at least of the murders. In the last five years 143 cases were detected in the Dantewara Tahsil, 91 in Bijapur, 65 in Jagdalpur as against only 11 in Kondagaon and 18 in Narayanpur. This certainly suggests that the Bison-horn Maria are much more given to illicit distillation than their brethren of the north. But, of course, these figures may only reflect greater energy